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NAVIGATION OF PENNS CREEK

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NAVIGATION OF PENNS CREEK

BY

J. G. SHIVELY

MILLMONT UNION COUNTY PA.

1963

INTRODUCTION

Someone has said that one should never write that grandfather said this or that, for everybody had grandfathers, and no one cares what they said. Since I do not agree with that advice, I shall disregard it.

One of my earliest recollections is of my grandfather, Jacob S. Shively (1827-1912), telling of his many interesting experiences. One of his stories that especially intrigued me, was about the arks that came down Penns Creek, laden with flour, whiskey, and other products. Although their numbers had greatly decreased by the time that he, as a young man, took over the old Shively saw mill (later Rearick's) about 1847, there were still enough of them running to be quite annoying. He said that whenever there was high water they would come down the creek, tearing the boards out of the chute of his dam. He was obliged to wade into the icy water and repair it before any sawing could be done. Often, he said, before he had a log sawed, another ark would repeat the damage. I was only a young lad when grandfather passed on, so had never pressed him for details of the construction of these arks. Although I never lost interest in the matter, for many years the task of keeping that that gaunt, gray member of the canine family from the door, forced it into the background.

About 1940 I began to realize that, if any information were to be obtained, it was high time to do something about it. An old gentleman in the western end of the valley, was said to have been on one of them when a boy. I set out to see him, but on arriving where he lived, was told that he had suffered a stroke of paralysis the previous day and was unable to speak. Next I interviewed the oldest man I could find living along Penns Creek. He had never seen an ark; in fact he said he had scarcely heard anything about them. Another octogenarian said he had seen several go down the creek; but when pressed for details he described a raft of sawed lumber. Then I came across a statement by Mr. R. V. B. Lincoln--that dean of western Union County Historians--written in 1900, that no arks had gone down Penns Creek within the past 50 years. Right then I quit looking for any first hand information.

It was fortunate that the matter was mentioned to my old friend, Mr. William Boop. His mother was a daughter of Peter Dorman, one of the ark pilots, and the subject had been a matter of common conversation in the family when Wm. was a boy and young man. He had a very retentive memory, was thoroughly reliable, and proved to be my best informant.

Fragmentory information was obtained from a few other persons whose names will be mentioned in connection with the information they furnished.

It is regretable that more information was not obtained whill still available, both by myself and others, for excepting the writings of Mr. Lincoln, there is very little in print; so, perhaps this brief work, imperfect as it is, may prove better than none at all.

For my many errors of typography, I can only offer the excuse that my fingers have been more acustomed to hammer and wrench than to the keys of a typewriter.

Millmont, Pa. May 1963 J.G.S

NAVIGATION OF PENN'S CREEK

To those who have known Penns Creek only during its more tranquil moments, possibly as fishermen wading its shallow waters or perhaps as picnickers along its banks, the term navigation may seem mis-applied. To those who have seen it at flood, or even during the common spring freshets, the possibility of its floating a craft of considerable size is quite apparent; but even an "old tar"accompanying Adam Wilt, Ab. Green, Christ Seebold, Peter Dorman, or any of the other old time ark pilots, would have been forced to admit that the experience was as thrilling and the navigation more hazardous than the sailing of a larger vessel on the briny deep.

Very little is known about navigation of Penns Creek, even by the descendants of the pioneers who lived along its banks and for whom it was the most practical form of transportation for over half a century. In fact, some even doubt that it existed at all, pointing out the sharp curves, rocks, etc., which would have been encountered along its course.

It is our purpose to prove that large flatboats, known as arks, were used extensively on Penns Creek; that this form of navigation was considered of enough importance that it was governed by numerous acts of Assembly; and so far as information is available, to show how, when, and by whom it was acomplished.

WHY ARKS?

Before the American Revolution, the disposal of surplus grain and other products was no problem for the settlers of Buffalo Valley, or the other regions remote from the large centers of population; for with few exceptions there was no surplus. In fact most of the settlers were hard pressed to produce enough for their own needs during their first years in this wild country. New settlers coming into the valley were glad to buy anything that their neighbors, already established, could spare. Then came the Revolution, and those who remained to defend their homes and communities found little time to cultivate their land,much less to increase their tillable acerage.

The autumn of 1781 found the region along Penns Creek almost deserted. Not until the summer of 1783 did most of the settlers return to their homes. Many new settlers also came during that and the following years. Now that the danger from Indians was past, the carving out of farms from the virgin forest began in earnest; and before the end of the decade they had changed from importers to exporters, as shown by the following, from the report of The Society for the Improvement of Roads and Inland Navigation:

> "In the year 1788 large quantities of wheat and flour were carried up the river (Susquehanna) for use of the settlers in Northumberland County(which then included the entire course of Penns Creek). In 1790, after the month of March, 30,000 bushels of wheat returned down the river from the same county."

Now that there was a surplus, especially of wheat and rye, some means had to be found for getting it to market. The nearest overland markets were Easton and Reading. The nearest good market

was Philadelphia. Even east of the Susquehanna it was not considered profitable to transport wheat by team for distances over 75 miles, and west of the river there were no roads worthy of the name.

Most roads then, were merely opened, not made. The first road in the area was opened by Reuben Haines, in 1770 or 1771, in order to encourage settlement on his vast holdings in eastern Penn's Valley. This road ran from Northumberland up throughDry Valley, then across Buffalo Valley and up through the Seven Mile Narrows to Penn's Valley.

In 1775, by order of the Court, a road 30 feet wide was laid out from Derr's Town (Lewisburg)westward, roughly following present route 45, and terminating a short distance below the present village of Hartleton.

In 1786, viewers were appointed by the Northumberland County Court, to lay out a road from the upper part of Penn's Valley to Sunbury, "To take the place of the old road, whose badness is well known." In November of that year Col John Clark, Capt John Lowden and Philip VonNeida, reported a road from the eastern end of the Seven Mile Narrows to Peter Keister's place (Now Hartleton).

At May session s 1789, Samuel Mathers, Col. John Clark, John McPherson, Christian Scheibly (Shively)and Wm. Mohr reported that they had "laid out a road from the second hollow in Big Blue Hill to Hartley's house, where Peter Keister now lives (Hartleton), on the road from Davidson's Ferry, to Penn's Valley."

These and other roads laid out during those times were of great value to the settlers, but they came far short of meeting their requirements; so more and more they turned to Penns Creek as a means of transportation. At first, it is likely that small cargoes of wheat, flour and whiskey were sent down in dugout canoes or other small boats; but surplusses mounted, so larger craft were built and used.

Just when the first arks were used on Penns Creek we do not know, and there is little in print to guide us. The following accounts tell of their use on other streams. Thadius Harris, in his "Journal of a Tour Into the Territory Northwest of the Alleghenies Mountains"(1803) wrote of the trading boats going down the Allegheny and Ohio rivers:

> "These boats are generally called 'arks' and are said to have been invented by Mr. Kryder on the Juniata about ten years ago. They are square nosed, flat bottomed, about 40 feet by 15, with sides six feet deep, covered with a roof of thin boards--They hold from 200 to 500 barrels of flour. They require but four hands to navigate them; carry no sail and are wafted down the current."

In 1796,Zachariah oulson of Philadelphia, published a pamphlet entitled, "A Description of the River Susquehanna".....from which the following regarding its tributary, the Juniata:

> "In the spring of the year 1795, Mr Kryder came down from his mill near Standing Stone on Juniata, in the neighborhood of Huntingdon, and about 86 miles from

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the Susquehanna, in a flat bottomed boat, with 175 barrels of flour. He passed Wright's Ferry in the morning and was at Havre de Grace with enough timein the evening of the same day to put his flour aboard a shallup, which delivered it at Baltimore the next day at 12 o'clock.

Thomas Cooper, writing in 1794, states that: A boat with 1600 bushels of wheat has gone down Penns Creek to Baltimore." If this statement is correct, and the boat referred to was an "ark," it antedated by at least one year the first voyage of the "inventor"of the ark. That navigation on Penns Creek, as well as on the Susquehanna, was contemplated at a much earlier date, is evident from the fact that in 1771 both of these streams were declared public highways;John Lowden, first ownerof the site of Northumberland, and later a prominent officer in the Revolution, being commissioned to make both streams navigable. Certainly it was not intended that he should make them navigable for sailing vessels, so we may presume that they were to be made navigable for arks and small craft.

In 1792 another act was passed by the Penna. Legislature, making Penns Creek a public highway to the mouth of Sinking Creek (Spring Mills). The commissioners acting under this and the law of 1771, made various attempts to raise money by subscription to defray the expenses of improving these streams, but with little success; so, on March 1, 1807, it was enacted that,"Samuel Templeton, George Long, Robert Barber, Peter Fisher, James Duncan, Adam Wilt, Christopher Seebold, Jr., and George Weirick, be and are hereby appointed as commissioners, to raise by way of lottery, $4,000.00 to be by them applied, for removing all natural and artificial constructions as are not authorized by law, out of Penns Creek, in the County of Northumberland, from the mouth thereof to Green's Mill (Weikert)." The act further provided that before the commissioners proceeded to place the tickets on sale they should lay the lottery scheme before the governor for his approbation. They were also required to give bond for faithful performence of their duties. Robert Barber was appointed treasurer and in October of that year advertised a scheme of cash prizes ammounting to $30,000. Few if any chances were sold and the scheme was abandoned.

An act of Assembly was passed March 26, 1821, sec. 66, appropriating $2,000 for improving navigation of Penns Creek in Union County; warrants for that ammountto be paid Peter Richter and Robert Barber, who were appointed commissioners "to superintend the judicious expenditures of same from the mouth of the creek to the Union County line." The act also authorized the Union County Court to appoint viewers to examine the work done by the commissioners and upon the report being certified to the governor the warrents should be drawn.

At September session 1824, Elias Youngman and John Ray reported that, "in pursuance of order of Court we have proceeded to view and examine the work done by Robert Barber, r., for improving the navigation of Penns Creek from Steer' Mill (More lately Bellas' and Rearick's lower mill) to the Centre County line, and in our opinion the work has been done to the best advantage."

By act of Assembly April 10, 1826, it was enacted "that the sum of $500.00 with interest thereon, of the Centre County Bank, is hereby appropriated for the improvement of Penns Creek between the Union County line and Spring Mills in Penn's Valley, said notes to be delivered by the State Treasurer to Jacob Kryder, Michael Musser and Jacob Henry of Centre County, who are hereby appointed commissioners to superintend the expenditure of said appropriation." The money was not all used within the time allowed, so on March 3, 1829 another act was passed directing the same commissioners to use the unexpended money plus a new appropriation of $200 for improvement of the creek from a point not farther down than six miles from the Union County line to a point not farther up than Spring Mills.

An act requiring supervisors of roads to remove obstructions from certain navigable streams in Huntingdon and Centre Counties was passed Feb. 27, 1822. This act was extended to Penns Creek on Feb. 13, 1831.

These rather lengthy quotations from laws relating to navigation of Penns Creek are given to show with what importance it was then regarded. It will be noted that, almost invariably the commissioners appointed to administer these acts were either mill owners, ark pilots, or both. Their work consisted mostly of removing rocks and other natural obstructions from the bed of the stream and the building of wing-dams where the water was shallow. It was also their duty to see that chutes were maintained in all dams, as prescribed by law. With the passage of the act of 1831 these duties fell to the supervisors of roads and the constables of the various townships were required to report any negligence on their part, under penalty of fine and imprisonment.

Although the act of 1792 made the creek a public highway as far as Spring Mills, little improvement was made from Weikert westward before 1826; but arks did navigate this portion of the stream nevertheless.

In a pamphlet entitled "A History of Centre County," issued in 1900, during Centre County's Centennial, the official historian, Mr. Fred Kurtz, states that, "The First ark that was sent down Penns Creek was built by Thomas Treaster in 1807, from Spring Mills.." Although not plainly so stated, it is likely that Mr. Kurtz meant that the first ark from Spring Mills was built in that year; for other accounts indicate that they had been coming down from "The Forks" (Coburn) for a decade or more.

Regardless of the precise year that arks were first used on Penns Creek, there is little doubt that their heyday was from about 1795 to 1815.

ARKS--THEIR CONSTRUCTION

Most persons with whom I have discussed this subject, if they had visualized these arks at all, thought of them as a sort of large raft on which was built a crude shelter for a ton or so of cargo. In fact that was my own impression before looking into the matter seriously. This however is far from the manner in which they were constructed. Regarding the details of their construction I have nothing origional to offer, so must be

content to quote from the meager descriptions given by writers of a bygone day. The best description I have found, pertaining specifically to the arks built on Penns Creek, is given by R.V. B. Lincoln, Esq.,(1822-1901) to whom we are indebted for the preservation of so much of the history and lore of the western part of Buffalo Valley. He wrote:

> "Henry Keister lived on the south side of Penns Creek opposite to Albright's flouring mill (later Yagel's) in the house now (ca.1885) Isaiah Shively's. He had a saw mill and an oil mill (to make oil from flax seed) on the banks of Penns Creek as well as a platform from which to turn arks, when they had reached the proper stage in their construction, for launching in the water. This 'ark turning' as it was called was equivalent to and meant about the same thing as the launching of a ship. In the first place posts or piling were securely fastened in the water near to a moderately high bank, a log was then laced on top of these posts or piles as long as the ark was supposed to be, usually 60 or 70 feet long; from there timbers were extended to the bank, and on this platform the bottom timbers of the ark were placed. The planks intended for the bottom of the ark were spiled (or pinned) to these timbers, which were hewed on two sides. The incipient ark then had to be turned over in order to bring what was intended to be the bottom of the ark to the water. An ark turning required a number of men to perform the operation. When a sufficient number of men collected by invitation and the prospect of having all the whiskey they wished, the embryo ark was pushed by handspikes off from the platform into the water; but in falling from the platform into the water it had to be managed so that what was the top of the platform would be the bottom in the water. After the ark had been successfully turned it was ready for the operation of putting on the sides etc."

Mr. Lincoln, lived only a short distance from this ark turning platform, and when a young man may have been present at more than one of these "turnings." The length of the arks which he mentions--60 to 70 ft.--is about the same as is given by other writers in reference to arks used on other streams, although it was not unusual for arks as long as 90 feet to be used on the Susquehanna and larger streams. It is doubtful however, that arks longer than 50 or 40 feet came down from Centre County, for it would have been impossible for them to clear the sharp curves of which there are many down through the mountains.

About the only other printed matter I have been able to find relating specifically to the construction and operation of arks on Penns Creek, is contained in an article contributed by A. D. Karstetter of Loganton, Pa., to the very interesting book "Rafting Days in Pennsylvania," edited by the late J. Herbert Walker, with foreword by Col. Henry W. Shoemaker, published by the Times-Tribune Co. Altoona, 1922, and already a collector's item. After giving a fine account of pioneer life as related to him by his grandfather, Daniel Karstetter, (1818-1907) and which space does not permit giving in full, Mr.Karstetter gives the following:

"Leonard Karstetter, father of Daniel Karstetter and Johnny Strahan, residents of 'The Forks' now Coburn, built large arks toward spring with which to transport flour by way of Karocndinha, now called Penns Creek. These arks were made of first class timber. Mr. Karstetter was the owner of the first mill on Penns Creek.

"The floor of the ark was made of hewed timber and was packed with tar and pitch so that it was perfectly water-tight. The sides were made in the same manner and were roofed with boards, and in the spring when the freshets came these arks were manned by a pilot a steersman and a bowsman and were put afloat and proceeded on their way to Selinsgrove. When the arks came through the Seven Mountains an old lady kepta resturant where she sold the arksmen old fashioned ginger bread and small beer. That was their first stopping place on their way, it being the noon hour.

"The trip from the 'Forks' to Selinsgrove was made in one day. The arks were sold there and the flour and arks were then manned by other crews and proceeded to Philadelphia. The arksmen who had taken the arks from Coburn to Selinsgrove then returned by night through the Seven Mountains, ready for another trip, so that the fleets of arks might be dispatched while the freshet lasted. That was the only outlet to the market for their grain. These men often encountered wolves and panthers on their return trip, but they were of sturdy character and were ready for any attack."

Mr. Karstetter states that the arks were of large size, but gives no dimensions; so we must still conclude that they were of smaller size than those built farther down stream. He mentions only flour as cargo, but this may be accounted for by the fact that Leonard Karsterrer was a miller and therefore was primarily interested in shipping his own commodity. His selling of the arks and cargo at Selinsgrove also was not the usual practice, since most Penns Creek arks proceeded as far down as Marietta, and many of them to tide water. Regarding his statement that Leonard Karstetter was owner of the first mill on Penns Creek, he may have meant at Coburn or in Centre County.

Mr. Lincoln states that "In 1781 the first mill on Penns Creek afterwards known as Ruhl's, Kauffman's and Knaur's, was built by Adam Smith. (This mill was later known as Halfpenny & Grove's and was converted into a hydro electric plant which furnished Mifflinburg with electric current. Later it was purchased by the P.P. & L. Co. and has now been converted into a chickery.) Documents in the Shively Collection show that the builder, or at least the first owner of this mill was David, not Adam Smith. John Neese is also said to have had a mill about three miles farther down stream as early as 1781, later known as Green's, Stees', Bellas', and Rearick's lower mill.

For further details of the ark's construction we must look to descriptions of those used on other streams, as recorded by writers who lived during the time they were in use. From these accounts it appears that the earlier arks were held together by wooden pins, one writer stating that not one hundred nails were

used in their construction, because of their expense. Before about 1812 practically all nails were made by hand and the names used designated the price per dozen: i.e. 20 penny, 20 pence per dozen.

Most arks used on Penns Creek and other streams of comparable size, were 16 feet in width. Their draught when loaded was about 18 inches. While it was the builders intent to make them perfectly water-tight, this was seldom acomplished. Two men were sometimes required to bail out the water during a voyage. The arks were steered by oars about half the length of the craft, one lashed to the bow and another to the stern. They were also provided with setting poles for "pushing off" and helping them over dams and shallows.

Arks used on Penns Creek may have been deeper before 1832 than thereafter, for in that year the first covered bridge was erected at Glen Iron, and became a limiting factor. Arks could run only during times of high water, and this bridge being only 11 feet above normal water level, left little head-room to spare.

The larger arks used on the Susquehanna are said to have carried as much as 60 tons; therefore, it is safe to assume that the larger ones on Penns Creek carried at least 40 tons.

The cost of arks used on the Susquehanna is estimated at about one dollar per foot of length. While this seems like a ridiculously low price, it must be remembered that the best of timber was then almost worthless on the stump, and many of the builders considered their own labor, during the winter months, of little value. Since they were not intended to be returned up stream, these arks were usually broken up and sold at their destination, atprices ranging from one fourth to three fourths of their cost. About 4000 board feet of the finest hewn white pine planking was used in the construction of a 16X60 foot ark.

ARKS--THEIR NAVIGATION

Penns Creek, while still bordered by virgin forest, was a much deeper and narrower stream than it is today. Floods and freshets ocurred then as now, but the stream rose and fell more slowly, due to the deep layer of leaves and decayed vegetation which covered the surrounding area and absorbed much of the rain and melted snow. Ordinary rains affected the creek very little, a hard rain being required to muddy the water.

My grandfather, Jacob S. Shively (1827-1912), who will be referred to repeatedly hereafter as "grandfather" -- told me that his grandfather, Christian Scheibly (1751-1842), told him that when he first came to the White Spring area of Buffalo Valley in 1774, he found a tree lying across Penns Creek near where the White Spring run enters the creek. Tying his hunting knife to a small sapling, he walked out on the tree trunk and and speared a large mess of fish. I asked grandfather how it would have been possible for a tree to span the creek at that point, for it is now well over 200 feet wide. His answer was, "well, the creek wasn't nearly so wide then and the trees grew mighty tall."

Various attempts to improve the navigation of Penns Creek have been mentioned; but regardless of any improvement that was, or could have been made, the taking of a cargo of 40 tons down

this roaring stream on one of those arks, was a task not to be taken lightly. Many whole cargoes were lost; there were some narrow escapes and some drownings.

Some years ago, Mr. Franklin Culp, buggy maker, of Hartleton, then an octogenarian, told me that a man named "Yuckley," one of the crew on an ark coming down from Centre County, was drowned about a mile above the Union County line, near the old "Aumiller place" (now Winters'), when his ark capsized. In his youth, he said, the spot was commonly known as "Yuckley's Hole."

Back of Little Mountain, about two miles west of Weikert, there is a large rock known as "Butter Rock," because of the wreckage there of a number of arks coming down from Centre County, partly laden with butter. When the casks containing the butter were thrown against the rock, some of them burst, almost covering the rock with butter; and as "Butter Rock" it has been known ever since.

This story has become a sort of legend, and like all legends, has many versions. The number of arks involved varies with the narrator. I shall give it as related to me by the late Mr. William Boop, who had a very retentive memory and whose veracity was above question. He had it from his mother, who was a daughter of Peter Dorman, one of the pilots. He said that the right side of the creek (Jack's Mountain side) had been cleared for navigation, and that all of the pilots knew that they must hug the right shore immediately after rounding a sharp curve just a short distance above the rock. During the previous night there had been a great storm and downpour of rain, which caused a large tree to fall from the Jack's Mountain side, entirely obstructing the cleared channel. A number of arks had started from "The Forks" (now Coburn), at daybreak, so spaced that there should have been little danger of collision. Mr. Boop could not recall the exact number of arks his mother said were involved, but thought there were at least four. The current was bearing the lead ark along at a good rate of speed--for there is considerable fall at this point--when on rounding the curve only a short distance above the rock, the fallen tree loomed in front of them. There was no time to attempt a landing and the pilot had to make a quick decision between striking the giant tree or trying to pass through the uncleared channel, which was studded with large rocks, some of them reaching almost to the surface, even during periods of high water. He chose the later course, and in the parlance of arksmen "stoved." Unable to warn those following, the next ark crashed also, and so on until all were piled up. One or more of them struck the giant boulder, "Butter Rock," which projects from the left bank.

A barn was built from the timbers and bottom planking of these arks, on what has been known for many years as the "Shafer Place," on the north side of Little Mountain, just where the public road crosses the P.R.R. track. The barn has now fallen down and the house was destroyed by fire several years ago. Wishing to verify, if possible, the story of this barn, I went there in Feb. 1936. The roof had already fallen in but the sides were mostly intact. All of the side boards were 16 feet in length, were of white pine two inches thick, and were from 12 to 20 inches in width. Nearly all of them had two one inch holes near

each end, one four feet from each end and two in the center. The timbers of the barn also had one inch holes and many of them still contained the origional wooden pins, which had been chopped off. Some photographs were taken of the barn, its planking, also of "Butter Rock" and the curve above it. One of the planks has been preserved and may be seen in the "Shively Collection."

Mr. Boop did not know in what year this wreck ocurred, nor have I been able to get any authentic information elsewhere; but the fact that the planking was pinned to the timbers, rather than spiked, indicates that it was within the first quarter of the past century.

Mr. Boop also related the following story, which he had good reason to know was factual. One of the pilots--I shall not mention his name--had been employed to take an especially large cargoe of whiskey from the vicinity of the present village of Laurel Park. It was the usual proceedure for most of the pilots, on reaching Harietta, to employ a local river pilot to guide them through the treacherous waters of the Conewago Falls. Here a perfect knowledge of the location of huge boulders, often almost submerged, was necessary, if the passage was to be made with any degree of safety. The Penns Creek pilot had imbibed rather freely of his cargoe during the voyage, and upon aproaching the falls, announced to his crew that he could run them as well as any man on the river. Realizing the danger his crew made every effort to dissuade him. Failing in this they landed against his orders and he continued on alone. Hardly had the ark entered the falls when it crashed against a rock, spilling the pilot and his cargoe into the roaring waters. For a time he disappeared among the barrels and debris, but finally appeared near the shore and was rescued. Blowing the water from his lungs he said in Pennsylvania Dutch,"Mein Gott! Ich hob gemaind ich het's letsch'd brode im bauch kot." (My God! I thought I had the last bread in my belly.) As a result of this experience, the old pilot went on the "water wagon" for the rest of his days. It was the loss of several cargoes like this that that caused John Fisher, owner of the largest distillery in western Buffalo Valley (at Laurel Park)to sell out and leave the valley It is probable that the incident above referred to had to do with one of his cargoes, which may have consisted of some 8000 gallons, which, though only worth from 25¢ to 50¢ per gallon was a considerable loss.

David Scott, writing in 1827says that:

> "A voyage across the Atlantic does not invoke so much danger to life and property as the navigation of the Susquehanna (and the same might have been said of Penns Creek) from the New York State line to tide-water. Property can only be floated down in time of high floods, which seldom occur except at the breaking up of the ice and melting of the snow in the spring season. During these floods the river is not navigable with any degree of safety for more than a week or ten days. The consequence is that the whole trade of the Susquehanna descends at nearly the same time; the markets in the towns and villages along the river are overstocked and the owners are frequently obliged to sell at ruinous sacrifices.....

The loss occasioned by accidents incident to river navigation is estimated at five percentper year."
Another writer stated that not more than two out of three arks reached tide-water. Perhaps the actual loss was somewhere between these two estimates.

Grandfather told me that whenever an ark stoved; people for miles around congregated on the banks of the creek, searching for damaged cargo As long as the barrels and casks did not burst open, allowing their contents to become damaged, persons finding them were obliged to restore them to their owners; but damaged cargo--whether by statute or custom I do not know--became the property of the person who salvaged it.

He also told of a neighbor at White Springs, who was a noted teller of tall stories; in fact he was known as the village liar. One day he was thaveling by horse and buggy, westward from the village on what was known as the "Red Ridge Road." Another neighbor, on approaching from the opposite direction, also by horse and buggy, stopped him and said, "Sam saag mir en grose legg."(Tell me a big lie.) Apparently in a great hurry old Sam answered that he hadn't time being on his way up to Lincoln's where an ark had stoved. Cracking his whip he was off in that direction. His neighbor turned around and followed but was soon outdistanced. Not until he reached Lincoln's and was assured that no ark had wrecked there, did he realize that old Sam had only complied with his request, and with a vengance.

When the first ark went down Penns Creek there were already some grist mills and saw mills along its course. These made navigation slow and difficult, so it was not long until legislation was enacted requiring the owners of all dams to "make and leave open a space of 20 feet near the middle of of said dam at least two feet lower than any other part thereof." The act also provided that throughout the same width should be made a platform of stone or timber, allowing a gradual descent, lowering the waters of the dam, etc. This had the effect of greatly lowering the water of the dam, and to overcome this , most mill owners placed planks across the open space. On approaching a chute thus closed, the arksmen, as was their right, steered for it, the impact tearing out the planking and sometimes a part of the dam also, They went their way but the mill owner was obliged to wade into the icy water--for rubber boots were unknown--and again close the chute. This sometimes happened a number of times in one day and caused much ill feeling between the arksmen and the mill owners. This was especially true of the sawmill owners. The grist mill owners were obliged to make use of the arks, so they just grinned and bore it.

"On the 28th of December,(1792), a petition was presented to the Senate on the part of Simon Snyder and Anthony Selin's heirs, to enable them to maintain a dam across Penn's Creek of the height of two and a half feet. This aroused the settlers along the cresk and produced a remonstrance, read in the Senate, March 4, 1773, which is interesting for some statements it contains. It states "that Simon Snyder and Anthony Selin,, before his death, erected a dam across the main current of Penn's Creek;that there were no less than ten mills within nine miles of Snyder's, some of which grind the year round unobstructed by ice, and they subjoin a list

of the mills with their distances from Snyder's: Lauterslager's and Pickles, within three miles; Moore's, three miles and a half; Shocks, four miles; Rush's, five miles; Hickadorns, six; Maclay's, seven miles, Swineford's, ditto; Weitzel's, eight and Fredrick Stees', nine miles. This being the case we consider it highly injurious to stop the whole navigation of Penn's creek, in order to promote the individual interest of Simon Snyder, Esquire"....
--From Linn's Annals of Buffalo Valley, pages 275-276.

Although most of these mills were not on Penns Creek, all of their owners were no doubt interested in using it to transport their flour. This petition was signed by twenty seven prominent men of the area, practically all either mill owners or ark pilots. It is especially interesting because it proves that arks were running in worthwhile numbers at this early date.

The late Mr. Edward Zubler, of Dice, told me that his grandfather, Peter Wehr, who kept tavern about a mile north of Penns Creek, on the old stage road from Mifflinburg to Middleburg, often provided lodging and entertainment for the arksmen who tied up at Sampsell's Dam for the night. Sometimes these arks were partly loaded at mill, distillery or wharehouse up stream and would finish out their load farther down. On occasions when arks were loaded in that vicinity and night overtook them there, one of the younger members of the crew was sent afoot to inform Mr. Wehr, who would promptly hitch his team to his three seated spring-wagon and convey them to his tavern; returning them to the creek next morning, bright and early, in the same manner.

Peter Wehr and his tavern were well known throughout this area. His name is mentioned in a little ballad made up by a local rymster, a couplet of which ran:

"Peety Wehr's tavern stands on the level;
Billy Blank's sawmill runs like the Devil."

ARKS--THEIR CARGO

WHEAT AND FLOUR--Some of the first arks going down Penns Creek carried mostly wheat as cargo, but it was not long until there were enough mills to convert the wheat into flour, thus reducing its bulk and at the same time increasing its value. Flour was then packed in tight barrels which held 196 lbs. They were made by local coopers, which for many years was a flourishing trade. One writer says that, at one time almost every other man in the village of Weirickstown (Penns Creek, P.O.)was a cooper.

RYE AND WHISKEY-- The first crop usually planted on new or "wild" land was rye. While it yeilded more bushels per acre than wheat, when sold as grain it brought only about half as much. For this reason most rye was converted into whiskey, thus reducing its weight by about two thirds while increasing its value considerably, although not as much as one might suppose. In 1810, the price of whiskey varied from 20cents to 50 cents per gallon and flour averaged about $2.10 per barrel.

During the early days of settlement there were many small stills throughout Buffalo Valley, some estimates being as high as one to every five families. By the turn of the century these had mostly given way to larger distilleries. In 1791 Congress passed the

whiskey tax of four pence per gallon. When in 1794 a serious attempt was made to collect it, the Whiskey Rebellion resulted. Liberty poles were erected throughout the region west of the Susquehanna and feelings ran high. A show of force on the part of the governmentwas required to put down the insurrection. The backwoods settlers felt that they were being discriminated against, claiming that the tax represented about one fourth the value of the whiskey they produced while only about one eighth the value of that produced near Philidelphia. A group of western Pennsylvanians in their petition to the national House of Representatives expressed their feelings thus: "We are therefore distillers through necessity, not by choice, that we may comprehend the greatest value from the smallest size and weight."

R. V. B. Lincoln, in his old age, was often heard to remark that conditions in Hartley Township had greatly improved during his lifetime. "When I was a boy," he said, "there were 12 distilleries in Hartley township and only three schools; now there are twelve schools and no distilleries!" The following is another of his contributions on the subject:

> "The next important branch or industry was the distilling of whiskey. This article was in daily use by nearly all the male inhabitants. It was supposed to furnish the motive power for all undertakings that required physical exertion. A harvest could not be cut or stored, a log cabin or barn raised, or an ark turned without its invigorating influence. At all public gatherings such as vendues, military musters, elections, etc., it was freely used and its exhilerating influence found vent in fights that were common on such occasions. The distilleries furnished a market for the surplus rye and corn, which in the condensed form of whiskey could be sent to market at small expense. Whiskey was pure then, and less injurious to health than the adulterated beverage now manufactured; yet the excessive use of it then as now, bore its legitimate fruit of evil."

In an article which appeared in the Union County Standard-Journal of June 19, 1952, Dr. Lewis Theiss, noted writer and historian, writing of the widespread manufacture and use of whiskey by the early settlers, made this statement:

> "The result of this situation was that we were in a fair way to become a nation of drunkards."

Better roads, the opening of the canal system, and the American Temperance Society, organized in 1830, probably saved us from that fate; but not until 1850 had farm manufacture of whisky practically ceased.

CLOVER SEED -- After several years of cultivation the soil produced enormous crops of clover, the second crop usually being allowed to ripen for seed. At first, like wheat and rye, it was threshed with a flail, but after a time stationary clover mills were built and it was hauled there to be hulled. One of these mills stood on the property now owned by Mr. Donald Wilson, just south of Millmont. John Cummings was the ownerfrom about 1815 until 1831 when he was elected Sheriff of Union County.

The quantity of clover seed exported from Union County--6,000 bushels in 1825-- would indicate that it must have formed an important part of the cargo carried by arks, especially in earlier years--for by this time much of it was transported by wagon.

MEAT and BUTTER

A considerable quantity of cured meat and butter were carried as cargo, much of it, especially butter, coming from Centre Co.

POTASH and PEARL ASH

Land was cleared much faster than a market could be found for the timber; in fact for many years there was no market for it. Many of the settlers bore a sort of hatred toward the trees because of the ammount of toil necessary to dispose of them. The finest of trees were often cut down, rolled on great piles and burned. These "log rollings" were usually carried on at night, the people of the neighborhood gathering togather and making merry by the light of the great fires, which could be seen for miles. Enormous piles of ashes were produced and this was often leeched and boiled until dry in large kettles. The black potash which resulted was sold for manufacture into pearl ash which sold for two to three hundred dollars per ton. It may be presumed that these products too formed an important part of the cargo.

SPLIT SHINGLES

Suitable logs, usually of clean white pine, were sawed to length and split into shingles, for which there was ready sale in the eastern markets. A special tool was used for splitting these shingles, consisting of a knife like blade about 15 in. long with a hole in one end for a wooden handle. The blade, which was somewhat wedge shaped was struck with a mallet, thus causing the block to split with the grain. These shingles being of light weight were sometimes piled on top of the load of other items or used to fill vacant space.

The following interesting notice appeared in the Union Times published at New Berlin, under date of March 26, 1825:

> "Union County sends annually to market a surplus of about 150,000 bushels of wheat, 2,600 barrels of whiskey, 6,000 bushels of clover seed and 200 tons of pork.....Centre County spares for foreign consumpion about 180,000 bushels of wheat, 6,000 bushels of clover seed and 1,000 barrels of whiskey."

While we have no way of knowing just what percentage of these products went down in arks at this rather late date, 20 percent would probably be a conservative estimate.

Much of the grain, whiskey and produce carried by arks from the upper reaches of Penns Creek was first stored in a large wharehouse that stood on the creek bank, just west of the mouth of Laurel Run (about 1 mile south of Laurelton). This wharehouse was owned by Henry Roush, who also owned a mill and distillery at the entrance of the Seven Mile Narrows. This was then

considered a fine location since all traffic to and from Penn's Valley passed by. Roush purchased the mill from Adam Wilt about 1814 and for thirty years did a thriving business. Farmers for miles around sold their grain and other produce to him. Many from Penn's Valley preferred the task of hauling it down through the narrows, to the risk of losing it by the water route. Roush failed financially in 1842 and moved west, after which the mill and distillery burned. In adition to the buildings mentioned there was a store and several dwellings at this location. Now touriste passing the spot can see no trace of this once thriving little community.

When the first mill at Laurel Park was built by Peter Fisher, in 1793, a large platform was constructed in connection with it for the purpose of loading arks. The late Mr. Irvin Shively told me that his step-father, Jefferson Jordan, remembered seeing it as a boy, before the old mill was torn down in 1847. It was replaced by the present structure, known to the present generation as Yagel's Mill(presently Stanley Pick's chickery), the same year. Mr. Shively also stated that Jordan often pointed out to him a large stone near the south bank of the creek where he had helped to build arks when a young man. The stone had a deep depression in its center where one of the piles mentioned by Mr. Lincoln, was fastened, which in turn supported the platform on which the ark rested during the first part of its construction.

South-east of the village of Millmont, where the public road hugs the north bank of Penns Creek, is a spot widely known, especially to fishermen, as "the landing." Few know why it is so called. It was here that the arks were tied up to be loaded with flour from the mill nearby, owned from 1781 until 1804, by its builder, David Smith. Smith sold to Barber & Heise, Barber later becoming sole owner. He sold to John Ruhl, who owned it until 1852, by which time arks had ceased to run (also see p.6).

Sampsell's Dam was another loading place and has already been referred to. The mill powered by this dam was built by Peter Kuhns about 1814. Kuhns sold to George Sampsell in 1823; and Sampsell's dam it has remained.

New Berlin was usually the last stop of the up-stream arks, and those not already fully loaded, finished out their cargoes there.

The following interesting narrative is given by John Blair Linn in his "Annals of Buffalo Valley," p. 315. After giving an account of the death in Feb. 1798, of the celebrated Captain John Lowden, together with a brief sketch of his life, he says:

> "Captain Lowden's remains were conveyed down the river to Columbia, and buried there in the old burying ground. Mrs. Wright, daughter of the Late Pascal Lewis, of Buffalo Valley, now in her 81st year (about 1875), says her fatherand mother went part of the way, the day of the funeral, from Lowden's house to the river, or possibly Penn's Creek; that after Lowden's death, his slaves were brought over from his farm and left, part of them at Robert Barber's (at White Springs) and part of them at her father's, to stay until such time as robert Barber (Jr.)was ready to start down with a raft or ark.

> He took them to Columbia in that way. They had been slaves previous to 1780 and the younger ones were still in their apprenticeship, and as his estate was bound to take care of the older ones, Samuel Wright, his son-in-law, set apart forty acres for their habitation and maintainance, on the east side of Columbia, back of the river. Among these were Chloe and Phillis. Cloe was a regular Congo. Phillis died a few years ago, aged 105."

This was probably the strangest "cargoe" ever to go down Penns Creek in an ark.

During the period covering over half a century that arks were used on Penns Creek in large numbers, they must have been manned by scores of different men; but local historians record the names of only a few in this connection. After years of research, during which many of the order residents along Penns Creek were interviewed, I can add but two names to those already rather well known: Peter Dorman and Jefferson Jordan.

THE ARK PILOTS

THE WILT BROTHERS - Both George Wilt, Jr. and his brother, Adam, were ark pilots, but of the two, Adam became the most famous. In fact there is little doubt that he was considered the most skillful of the Penns Creek pilots. Permit me again to quote from the writings of Mr. Lincoln:

> "Adam Wilt came from Cumberland County in 1800, his father having bought from Michael Shirtz, some time before, the property at the entrance to the Penn's Valley Narrows.* Wilt kept tavern and ran the mill there until he was succeeded by Henry Roush in 1812 or 1814. He was also a surveyor (1813-1821), and in 1813 was appointed a justice of the peace by Governor Snyder. He was noted for his skill and dexterity in running an ark; and is said to have been the first man who took an ark successfully through the Conewago Falls. After leaving the narrows he lived on a large farm of 300 acres until 1826, when John Lincoln (the writer's father), became the owner, when Wilt removed to Hartleton and died there in 1830."

Mr. Lincoln states that Wilt is said to have been the first man who took an ark successfully through the Conewago Falls. Although not stated as a fact, it was, apparently, what the older residents in the area had told him. Perhaps what really was meant is that he was the first Penns Creek Pilot to run the falls with an ark, for there is ample proof that the river pilots were taking arks through to tide-water, long before Wilt came to Buffalo Valley. It is also possible that he was the first river pilot to acomplish this feat.

ABBOTT GREEN - Of Green, who took a turn at piloting arks in his youth, Mr Lincoln wrote:

> "Abbott Green, was the youngest son of Capt. Joseph Green, who was a settler in the valley prior to the Revolution and a prominent citizen in those stormy times. At the time of his death he was living at a saw mill on the south side of Penn's Creek, near the mouth of Weikert Run..
> "Here Young Green grew to manhood, with very meager edu-

*See last paragraph, page 13.

cational advantages, in the spring of the year running arks down the creek and river. In 1814 he was keeping a store in Hartleton. He subsequently removed to Lewisburg and took contracts upon the public works being constructed by the state. Among other works he built the dam across the Susquehanna River at Clark's Ferry, which for a long time went by the name of Green's Dam."

It is evident from the foregoing that Abbott Green's days as an ark pilot were before 1814, also that he and Adam Wilt were contemporaries. His father, after losing most of his possessions, consisting of, among other things, a mill on Buffalo Creek and another on Penns Creek --largely as a result of time and effort in the cause of liberty--removed to the location south of Weikert. There he died in 1902. He is buried in the old Lewis Cemetery, east of White Springs, where his remains are surrounder by those of almost two score of his brother officers and enlisted men of the American Revolution.

I beg your pardon for this digression, but just can't help mentioning this old cemetery, which seemed to have been all but forgotten. Recently however, some interest has sprung up, which we trust will continue.

JOHN FISHER - As a young man John Fisher ran arks transporting flour produced at his father's mill (At Laurel Park). It is also likely that he piloted some of his own cargoes of whiskey after opening his distillery nereby.* In later years however, although he still depended on arks to transport his product to market, they were manned by hired pilots and crews.

ROBERT BARBER, Jr., was a son of Robert Sr., (1750-1841 also buried in old Lewis Cemetery)who built the first house at White Springs in 1772, and the first grist mill there in 1797. That Robert Jr. ran arks as early as 1799 is indicated by the narrative by Mr. Linn, already quoted. In 1804 he purchased a mill about three miles farther up Penns Creek, from David Smith, subsequent owners of which have been already referred to. He continued to operate this mill until 1837, when he removed to Stephenson Co., Ill. During at least a part of the time that he owned the mill, he lived a short distance north east of the present village of Millment, now owned by Mr. Chas Meyhart--long owned by the late Mr. Chas. W. Bingeman. On these premises Barber also operated a distillery.

Grandfather said he remembered Mr. Barber and that his son, Henry, was one of his best friends before moving to Ill. Mr. Barber, grandfather said, once sent a large load of flour by wagon, to Philadelphia. The wagon was pulled by four large horses and was in charge of two local young men. After several weeks they returned, both horses and wagon much the worse for wear. When the young men made no move to turn over the proceeds, Mr. Barber began pacing to and fro in the mill, finally demanding, "Boys, the returns--the returns." Finally one of the boys mustered enough courage to reply, "Mr. Barber, the returns are all spent." The big city was just too much for two White Springs boys and they had celebrated.

THOMAS TREASTER was a Centre County pilot and is said to have brought down the first ark from Spring Mills in 1807.

* See page 9, paragraph 2.

LEONARD KARSTETTER was one of the early pilots and among the first to run arks down from "The Forks" (Coburn) in Centre Co. On these trips he was usually accompanied by Johnny Strahan as one of his crew. He built one of the first mills on Penns Creek.

PETER DORMAN (1781-1873) was a son of Ludwig Dorman, who lived on the south side of Penns Creek, about two miles southwest of the present village of Millmont, near where Mr. Bruce Boop now resides. He had a sawmill on the creek nereby. Peter was a cooper and made all sorts of wooden vessels such as pails, tubs and barrels; the later especially in demand for shipping whiskey and flour. During the spring freshets and also at other times when the water rose, due to heavy rains, he piloted arks owned by local millers and distillers. He began, as a young man, to run arks about the time that Wilt and Green retired as pilots. He continued to pilot arks as late as 1849 or 1850, according to his grandson, Mr. William Boop, before referred to, and who arrived at that conclusinn in this manner:

> "My farher, Jacob Boop," he said, "was born in 1835, and he told me that when he was a boy of about fourteen or fifteen he often sat by the hour on the south bank of Penns Creek near their home, at what is known as the 'Big Spinning Wheel,' (about two miles west of Glen Iron) watching for Peter Dorman and his two boys, Lewis and David, to float by on an ark. The boys, several years his senior, were his friends, and they, in company with their father often stopped at the Boop home on their way up creek--sometimes as far as Coburn--where they boarded the ark they were to bring down."

Lydia, daughter of Peter Dorman married Jacob Boop and became the mother of my informant.

One of Peter Dormans sons who accompanied him on some of his ark voyages, Lewis, later became famous as "the Panther Hunter." Full page pictures of him and of his last panther appear in the book, "Extinct Pennsylvania Animals," by Col. Henry W. Shoemaker. A chapter entitled "Dorman Panther (The life story of a Noted Hunter)" covers 23 pages of that gem of legend and folklore, "In the Seven Mountains," (1913) also by the same author.

David, the other son, though not so widely known, is said to have killed sixteen bears on Jack's Mountain, when well advanced in years. One of the prized items in the "Shively Collection" at Millmont, is his last rifle. It a percussion rifle of small bore--about 90 balls to the pound--and is still in shooting condition. His grandson, the late Mr. Lincoln Dorman, after carefully examining this rifle some years ago, remarked, "Sure that's grandpap's rifle. He and I shot mark with it many a time back of his shoemaker shop." (I beg your pardon; this was to be a story about arks, not rifles.)

CHRISTOPHER SEEBOLD Jr., 1763-1839), was a son of Christopher, Sr., who came to Buffalo valley about 1790 and in 1795, purchased from its builder, James Watson, the mill on Sweitzer Run, near the present village of Dice, about two miles northwest of New Berlin. Christopher Jr., ran arks on Penns Creek, mostly from New Berlin. For some time he carried on a two-way traffic on the creek, floating the arks down, loaded mostly with flour from the Seebold Mill, and drawing them back up stream, loaded with provisions and merchandise for the local markets. It is likely that these arks or boats

were specially built to suit his purpose. There are claims that this traffic was also extended down river for quite a distance; but pulling a boat up river with horses or mules would seem to have been almost impossible. This however, I can neither confirm nor deny. Christopher moved to New Berlin in 1813--the year Union County was created out of Northumberland--and figured prominently in the new County-seat. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1813 and elected County Treasurer in 1820.

JEFFERSON JORDAN (1827-1910), was one of the last of the Penns Creek pilots; I have no details of his experienc in this line, but his step-son, the late Mr. Irvin Shively, assured me that he (Jordan) helped to build and run a number of arks when a young man. He was considered one of the two best hewers with the broad axe in what was usually referred to as "tight end"(western end of Buffalo Valley), so called because the mountains come so close togather. Jacob Boop, already referred to, was his rival.

Mr. Shively also told me that Jordan cut, floated down creek and hewed the timbers used in the old covered bridge, across Penns Creek, about a mile west of Millmont. This last covered bridge spanning Penns Creek, its origional timbers hewn almost as smooth as though planed, still stands--a monument to Jeff Jordan and his skill with the broad-axe! With proper care it should last for another century. A few years ago its fate hung in the balance, but the County Commissioners then in office, wisely decided to replace the roof and siding and let it stand. May their successors do likewise.

(I've gone afield again, but just couldn't help adding a "plug" for the old "Red Bridge" for it is another of my pet interests, and of interest, I believe, to many others throughout our valley.)

THE LAST OF THE ARKS

After the turn of the past century, roads were gradually improved so that by the second decade considerable grain could be hauled overland, also other products; but what really brought the rapid decline in ark transportation was the opening of the West Branch Canal, which was completed in 1831. It was then possible to deliver surplus products to nearby points along the canal and have them shipped to Philadelphia, and other distant markets, for about one third the cost of overland transportation.

An attempt to connect the navigation of Penns Creek with the West Branch Canal was made in 1830. The Penns Creek Nabigation Co. was formed by fifteen prominent men of the area, including Robert Barber and Christopher Seebold, but nothing ever came of it.

In my introduction I have referred to R.V.B. Lincoln's statement made about 1900, that no arks had come down Penns Creek for 50 years. This statement was made in a broad way I believe, and it is quite possible that a few did come down in the early fifties. I have also referred to my grandfathers statement that they were still quite troublesome to him as a saw mill owner in the late forties.

Even though there had been no other contributing factors, it would have become impractical to run arks after the coming of the "Yankees" as the lumbermen from Maine were invariably referred to by the natives. Their log drives so choked the stream that navigation became impossible. Thus ended one of the most colorful phases in the annals of Penns Creek, and with the coming of the "Yankees" and their lumbering operations another began. But that is another story.